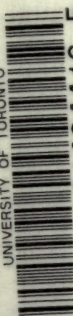


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Playgoers

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P56





PLAYGOERS

A Domestic Episode

ARTHUR PINERO

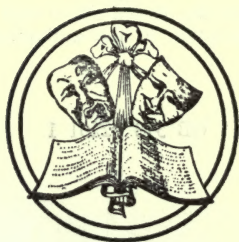
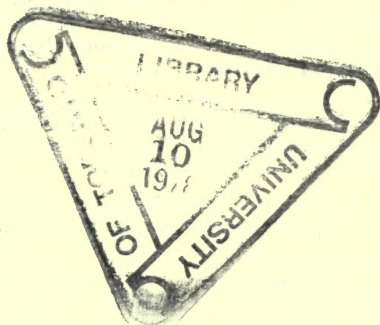
French's
Acting
Edition

PLAYGOERS

A DOMESTIC EPISODE

BY

ARTHUR PINERO



SAMUEL

FRENCH

LONDON

NEW YORK TORONTO SYDNEY HOLLYWOOD

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MADE AND PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY
LATIMER TREND AND CO LTD PLYMOUTH
MADE IN ENGLAND

PLAYGOERS

Produced at the St. James's Theatre on Monday evening,
March 31st, 1913

THE MASTER	<i>A. E. Benedict</i>
THE MISTRESS	<i>Mary Clare</i>
THE COOK	<i>Margaret Yarde</i>
THE KITCHENMAID	<i>Iris Fraser Foss</i>
THE PARLOURMAID	<i>Elizabeth Chesney</i>
THE HOUSEMAID	<i>Annie Walden</i>
THE USEFUL MAID	<i>Esmé Church</i>
THE ODD MAN	<i>E. Vivian Reynolds</i>

THE MISTRESS (*rising and putting her lips to his brow*). Besides, I've a reason for feeling happy just now *every* day.

THE MASTER. Reason——?

THE MISTRESS. The servants. Have you noticed them?

THE MASTER. I've noticed they're a new lot. (*Scowling.*) Rotters!

THE MISTRESS. A brand-new lot. And please don't call them rotters. (*Moving to the right.*) Darling, I am convinced that at last our miseries are ended and that we are in for a run of luck.

THE MASTER (*lighting a cigarette*). Good business, if that's the case!

THE MISTRESS. At the present moment, Ernest dear, we have a staff of domestics which, in my opinion, is as near perfection as is humanly possible.

THE MASTER (*without enthusiasm*). Hurrah!

THE MISTRESS (*sinking into the armchair on the left of the small table*). But, oh, my gracious.

THE MASTER. Yes, it has been a devil of a time.

THE MISTRESS. I couldn't have gone on much longer as we have been going on. (*Clenching her hands.*) Oh, the torture of the past eight months—the first eight months of our married life—when everything should have been rosy and ideal!

THE MASTER (*rising and approaching her*). My poor dear Norma.

THE MISTRESS (*animatedly*). Ring the bell, old boy.

THE MASTER (*going to the fireplace*). Right'o.

THE MISTRESS. What do you think I am going to do?

THE MASTER (*ringing the bell*). Ask me an easier one.

THE MISTRESS. I worked it out in my brain last night. I am going to give them a treat.

THE MASTER. Give *who* a treat?

THE MISTRESS. The servants, of course.

THE MASTER. Oh, tosh! When did this new gang come in?

THE MISTRESS. How unobservant you are! A week ago.

THE MASTER. Hadn't you better wait a bit?

THE MISTRESS (*jumping up*). No, I intend to act on a different system with this gang, as you term it, and to begin early. (*Joining him in the middle of the room.*) I mean to show all these cheerful, willing people that we are their friends as well as their employers, and that we consider it our duty to provide them with food for their minds as well as for their—you know, dear.

THE MASTER (*nodding*). U'm.

THE MISTRESS (*slipping her arm through his*). Ernest, perhaps we have been a little remiss in this respect up to now——

THE MASTER (*withdrawing his arm*). H'sh!

(*The PARLOURMAID enters, carrying a tray. She is a great deal more ladylike than any lady who has ever breathed.*)

THE MISTRESS (*sweetly*). Thank you, I didn't ring for you to clear, Beechcroft. I wish to see the servants.

THE PARLOURMAID (*elevating her eyebrows*). See the servants?

THE MISTRESS. All of you, here.

THE PARLOURMAID (*with a shade of hauteur*). Reahly? Nothing wrong, I trust?

THE MISTRESS (*smiling*). Nothing; quite the contrary.

THE PARLOURMAID. I'll bring them up as soon as we've finished our lunches.

THE MISTRESS. Do. I am sorry to have disturbed you.

THE PARLOURMAID. I won't hurry them, or they'll be eating their prawns without removing the skins. (*She retires.*)

THE MISTRESS (*glowingly*). Isn't she a refined girl?

THE MASTER. Extremely. But I say, Pussy, is it absolutely necessary to hold this confounded parade?

THE MISTRESS. Not absolutely; but I want to study the expression of their faces while you are making the announcement. (*Walking about.*) Oh, Ernest, is there anything in this world equal to the joy of giving pleasure to others!

THE MASTER. Oh, I make the announcement, do I?

THE MISTRESS. Certainly.

THE MASTER. But I haven't heard yet what form the blessed treat is to take.

THE MISTRESS. A theatre.

THE MASTER. Theatre?

THE MISTRESS. Yes, we are going to send them to the play, darling.

THE MASTER. My dear Norma, there are no pantomimes at this time of year.

THE MISTRESS. Pantomimes! These are grown-up, intelligent women, not a parcel of children.

THE MASTER (*grumblingly*). Well, anyhow, it'll be deucedly inconvenient for us.

THE MISTRESS (*halting*). Why, pray?

THE MASTER. Who is to cook and serve our dinner?

THE MISTRESS. Do we *never* dine at a restaurant?

THE MASTER. Often. But we're not in the habit of marching out of the house and leaving it totally unprotected.

THE MISTRESS (*coming to him and speaking very incisively*). My dear husband, will you have the common fairness to tell me whether I have said they are all to go to the theatre on the same night?

THE MASTER. Er—oh, I beg pardon.

THE MISTRESS. I have planned the affair in my head, down to the smallest detail. As a matter of fact, they are to go in botches.

THE MASTER. I fancy you mean batches.

THE MISTRESS. Don't be so fond of catching me up. Batches. Some one night, some another. (*Melting.*) Oh, Ernest, I am so excited about it! Tum-de-ay; tum-de-ay——!

(*She seizes him and they do a "glide" round the room. The door opens again and the PARLOURMAID returns, followed by the COOK, the USEFUL MAID, the HOUSEMAID and the KITCHENMAID, all with their mouths full. The MASTER and the MISTRESS stop dancing in some confusion.*)

THE MASTER (*under his breath*). Dash!

THE PARLOURMAID (*to the MISTRESS*). Heah they are. They thought they'd rather get it ovah.

THE MISTRESS. Delighted. (*To the COOK.*) Good mornin', Mrs. Hacket.

THE COOK (*a stolid, ponderous woman*). Good mornin', m'm.

THE MISTRESS (*in the middle of the room*). Will you sit down please—will everybody sit down? Mr. Dorrington has something to communicate to you. Sit on the settee, some of you. (*To the HOUSEMAID, pointing to the chair against the right-hand wall.*) Worringham, bring that chair forward. That's right; I want you all to be comfortable.

(*Obviously oppressed by the mystery shrouding the proceedings, the COOK, the KITCHENMAID and the USEFUL MAID seat themselves upon the settee, the PARLOURMAID enthrones herself in the chair on the L. of the small table, while the HOUSEMAID fetches the chair from the R. as directed and sits in it at the nearer end of the settee.*)

(*To the MASTER, in a whisper, gently pushing him towards the middle of the room.*) Now, darling. (*She sits upon the fauteuil-stool and eagerly watches the servants' faces.*)

THE MASTER (*addressing the servants*). Er—h'm—I should like you to understand that this is an idea of Mrs. Dorrington's—her idea entirely. Er—Mrs. Dorrington desires me to say—er—— (*To the COOK, who is steadily munching—irritably.*) I am afraid you're not nearly through with your lunch.

(*The COOK, moving her jaws regularly, regards him with dull eyes and offers no reply.*)

THE MISTRESS (*reprovingly*). Ernest!

THE MASTER (*with an effort*). I repeat, I am desired by Mrs. Dorrington to say——

(*The ODD MAN enters quietly, closes the door and advances to the back of the settee, where he takes up an attitude of deep*

attention. He is a genial, beery-looking individual in a linen jacket and baize apron, and with a dirty leather in his hand.)

Who's this?

THE MISTRESS. The Odd Man, dear.

THE MASTER (*in a low voice*). My hat! Do you wish to include *him*?

THE MISTRESS (*vaguely*). N-no; I hadn't thought of doing so.

THE MASTER (*to the ODD MAN*). What do you want?

THE ODD MAN (*pointing to the PARLOURMAID*). I'm 'ere in obedience to a messidge brought by this young lady while we was 'avin' a snack in the 'all.

THE MASTER. Er—— (*To the MISTRESS, turning away.*) Oh, you take this on, Norma.

THE MISTRESS (*rising*). Look here—I forget your name—Gage——

THE ODD MAN. Gale, m'm. G-a-l-e—Gale. Think of wind.

THE MISTRESS. Thank you, there is no need for me to think of wind. Look here, Gale, my message was to the servants——

THE ODD MAN. Egzackly, m'm——

THE MISTRESS. Don't interrupt me. I meant the regular servants, those who sleep in the house.

THE ODD MAN. I've dropped off to sleep in the 'ouse more than once. (*To the COOK.*) 'Aven't I, Mrs. 'Acket?

THE MISTRESS. Then you oughtn't to have done so. However, I can't discuss the point now. Be good enough to remain downstairs in case the tradesmen's or the visitors' bell rings.

THE ODD MAN (*lingering*). Right you are, m'm. It's been a misunderstandin' on my part; that's all it's been. The best of us is liable to mistakes——

THE MASTER (*rejoining the MISTRESS—to the ODD MAN*). Go away; go away.

THE ODD MAN (*touching his forehead*). Fust time I've 'ad the pleasure o' seein' you sir——

THE MASTER. The loss has been mutual.

THE ODD MAN. That is, to 'ave a conversation, so to speak——

THE MASTER. Yes, yes; go away.

THE ODD MAN (*producing a soiled and torn paper from his pocket*). Where's my list o' dooties——?

THE MASTER. You've got it. Run along.

THE ODD MAN (*whistling*). Phiou! Lucky I'm not required 'ere. My busy mornin'. (*He departs.*)

THE MISTRESS (*to the MASTER, reseating herself upon the fauteuil-stool*). Start afresh, darling.

THE MASTER (*resuming his address*). Er—h'm—as I have already informed you, I am desired by Mrs. Dorrington to—er—— (*To the COOK, who is still munching.*) For heaven's sake, Mrs. Thingamy, swallow and have done with it!

THE MISTRESS. Ernest!

(*The COOK gulps painfully.*)

Oh, Ernest!

THE MASTER. Sorry—sorry.

THE MISTRESS (*faintly*). Oh, dear! (*To the MASTER.*) Once more.

THE MASTER (*to the SERVANTS*). I am desired by Mrs. Dorrington to say that—er—in consideration of—er—your long and valuable services——

THE MISTRESS. Ernie!

THE MASTER. Hay?

THE MISTRESS. Only a week!

THE MASTER (*hastily*). I know, I know, I know—— (*To the SERVANTS.*) —in consideration of the long and valuable services which we have every reason to—er—hope and to—er—expect——

THE MISTRESS (*prompting him*). You will render us——

THE MASTER (*to the SERVANTS*). —every reason to hope and expect that you will render us, it is her wish—our joint wish, in fact—to give you occasionally a little—how shall I describe it?——

THE MISTRESS. Treat.

THE MASTER. Distraction.

THE MISTRESS. Wholesome amusement.

THE MASTER. And this being our intention, we propose to begin by sending you all to the play——

THE MISTRESS. The theatre——

THE MASTER. The theatre. And—er—and—er—— (*To the MISTRESS.*) That's all, I believe, Norma?

THE MISTRESS (*to the MASTER*). Thank you, dearest. (*Beaming upon the SERVANTS.*) Well? Well?

(*There is silence. The PARLOURMAID tidies her hair fastidiously.*

The HOUSEMAID, a solemn-visaged young woman, looks down her nose and tightly compresses her lips. The COOK's face remains a blank. The USEFUL MAID, a thin anaemic girl, stares into space with watery eyes. The KITCHENMAID, crushed into the farther corner of the settee by the COOK, is almost completely hidden.)

W-w-well?

THE USEFUL MAID (*suddenly breaking into sobs and searching for her handkerchief*). O'ho—o'ho—o'ho——!

THE MASTER (*to the MISTRESS*). Eh? What the——!

THE MISTRESS (*to the MASTER*). H'sh-sh-sh! (*To the USEFUL MAID, soothingly.*) Now, Trinder, Trinder, do try to control yourself.

THE USEFUL MAID (*wiping her eyes*). O'ho—o'ho! Such wonderful kindness *I've* never experienced in any situation *I've* been in!

THE MASTER (*to the MISTRESS, in a whisper*). Is she always——?

THE MISTRESS (*in the same tone, nodding*). Inclined to be a little hysterical—u'm.

THE USEFUL MAID (*to the MISTRESS*). You're the nicest lady *I've* ever had anything to do with. O'ho—o'ho—o'ho——!

THE MISTRESS (*gently*). Trinder—Trinder——!

THE USEFUL MAID. Mr. Dorrington too! Oh, what a th-th-th-thorough gentleman!

THE MASTER (*to the MISTRESS*). The Useful Maid, isn't she?

THE MISTRESS (*nodding again*). Yes.

THE MASTER (*sardonically*). Ha, ha, ha, ha.

THE MISTRESS (*indignantly*). Ernest!

THE USEFUL MAID (*to the MASTER*). You must excuse me, sir. I'm a trifle run down; that's the truth. (*To the MISTRESS.*) Isn't it, m-m-madam?

THE MISTRESS (*assentingly*). Below par.

THE USEFUL MAID. I've been talking about taking a tonic for ever so long. This decides me.

THE MASTER (*to the USEFUL MAID*). Well, under the Insurance Act——

THE MISTRESS (*reproachfully*). Ernie!

THE USEFUL MAID. O'ho—o'ho—o'ho——!

THE MISTRESS (*to the USEFUL MAID*). H'sh, h'sh, h'sh! There, there! Pull yourself together. I am glad you appreciate what we are doing for you. (*To the COOK, brightly.*) Now, Mrs. Hacket, it's *your* turn. Let us hear what *you* have to say.

THE COOK (*heavily*). Me, m'm?

THE MISTRESS. The treat—the visit to the theatre? Wake up, Mrs. Hacket!

THE COOK. Apologizin' for the question, m'm, I pre-soom this playgoin' ain't intended to interfere with our usual outs?

THE MISTRESS (*blankly*). Interfere—with your——?

THE COOK. Becos I don't think *that* 'ud be appreshayted by the gals, by any manner o' means.

THE MASTER (*looking at the MISTRESS*). Upon my soul——!

THE MISTRESS (*rising, stiffly*). Extraordinary!

(*The MASTER and the MISTRESS change places.*)

Of course your usual nights out will not be interfered with.

THE COOK. I mealy arst.

THE MISTRESS. Really, Mrs. Hacket——!

THE COOK. No offence, m'm.

THE MISTRESS (*tapping her foot upon the floor*). Not the least.

THE COOK. Then it 'ud best be on a Monday night, if it's to be at all.

THE MISTRESS. If it's to be——!

(*The ODD MAN reappears, closing the door as before.*)

THE MASTER. Here's that fellow again!

THE MISTRESS (*to the ODD MAN*). What is it, Gage?

THE ODD MAN (*advancing*). Gale, m'm. Think of wind.

THE MISTRESS (*hotly*). I shall *not* think of wind. Does anybody want Mrs. Hacket?

THE ODD MAN (*leaning upon the back of the settee*). Not that I'm aweer, m'm.

THE MASTER (*changing places with the MISTRESS*). Then, confound you——!

THE ODD MAN. It's like this, sir. I've been turnin' the lady's remark over in my mind, as to my not bein' a reg'lar servant——

THE MASTER. Oh, pickles!

THE ODD MAN. An' the conclooision I 'ave arrived at——

THE MASTER. You will arrive at a still speedier conclusion, so far as this establishment is concerned, if you're not careful.

THE MISTRESS. Most assuredly.

THE ODD MAN (*argumentatively*). You see, sir, my p'int is——

THE MASTER. Your *pint*! It looks as if your pint had been a gallon.

THE MISTRESS. Ha!

THE ODD MAN (*ignoring the suggestion*). My p'int is, that if a employer takes out a Inland Revenoo licence for a 'Andy Man——

THE MASTER. How dare you attempt to argue with me!

THE ODD MAN. That constitoots 'im a reg'lar servant. Therefore——

THE MISTRESS. Go away.

THE MASTER. Go away.

THE MISTRESS. Keep in the basement.

THE MASTER. Outrageous!

THE MISTRESS. What next?

THE ODD MAN (*producing his paper again, resignedly*). Where's my list o' dooties?

THE MASTER. You've already referred to it.

THE MISTRESS. It's getting worn out.

THE ODD MAN (*moving slowly to the door*). I'm gittin' wore out, fairly.

THE MISTRESS. Oh——!

THE MASTER. Be off!

THE ODD MAN (*at the door, reading his paper*). Hullo! Phiou! Winders! (*He withdraws.*)

THE MISTRESS (*walking away to the fireplace*). Oh! Oh! (*Pacing up and down.*) Terrible person!

THE MASTER (*pacing up and down the middle of the room*). Dreadful creature! (*Gradually calming himself.*) Oh, lor'! (*Wiping his brow.*) Stupid to allow oneself to be upset by trifles. Ha, ha, ha! (*To the PARLOURMAID.*) Well, my good girl—phew!—what observations have *you* to favour us with, eh?

THE PARLOURMAID (*languidly*). Observations? With regawd to the theatah?

THE MASTER. Precisely; with regawd to the theatah.

THE PARLOURMAID. Oh, I'm quite agreeable, I'm shaw.

THE MASTER. Agreeable!

THE MISTRESS. Agreeable!

THE PARLOURMAID. Provided an extrah seat next to mine is booked for my friend.

THE MASTER. Your——?

THE MISTRESS (*coming to the breakfast-table*). Friend?

THE MASTER. Who——?

THE PARLOURMAID. My fyonsay. I nevah attend places of amusement unaccompanied by my friend.

THE MASTER (*at a loss*). Er—indeed? (*To the MISTRESS.*) Perhaps *you* had better deal with this, Norma.

(*The MISTRESS advances and the MASTER seats himself upon the fauteuil-stool and glares at nothing in particular.*)

THE MISTRESS (*to the PARLOURMAID*). This is the first

I've heard of a young man, Beechcroft. How long have you and he been walking out?

THE PARLOURMAID (*raising her eyebrows higher than ever*). Walking out?

THE MISTRESS. Keeping company.

THE PARLOURMAID. Keeping company?

THE MISTRESS. Keeping company. Don't I speak plainly?

THE PARLOURMAID (*loftily*). I've known him for yeahs. But our engagement wasn't announced to our respectful families till Febyouaryry.

THE MISTRESS. Respective, not respectful. If you wouldn't try to use words that are beyond you——

(*The telephone bell rings in the hall.*)

Telephone.

(*The PARLOURMAID rises and saunters to the door.*)

Look sharp, Beechcroft! (*To the MASTER, as the PARLOURMAID disappears.*) I—I—I suppose there's no objection——?

THE MASTER (*between his teeth*). Extra ticket?

THE MISTRESS. An additional ticket?

THE MASTER (*gratingly*). I suppose not.

THE USEFUL MAID (*indulging in another fit of weeping*). O'ho—o'ho—o'ho! Oh, what kindness!

THE MASTER (*groaning*). Oh!

THE MISTRESS (*stamping her foot*). Silence, Trinder! Compose yourself.

THE USEFUL MAID. O'ho—o'ho—o'ho——!

(*The PARLOURMAID returns.*)

THE MISTRESS (*to the PARLOURMAID*). Who is it?

THE PARLOURMAID (*going back to her chair*). Wrong numbah.

THE MISTRESS. Well, Beechcroft, Mr. Dorrington and I have weighed your application carefully and we have decided to accede to it.

THE PARLOURMAID (*resuming her seat*). An extrah fotool for my friend?

THE MISTRESS (*graciously*). An additional seat for your friend.

THE PARLOURMAID (*arranging her apron*). Thenks awf'ly.

THE MASTER. Two.

THE MISTRESS (*to the MASTER, surprised*). Two?

THE MASTER. Two extra seats—one for himself and the other for his hat.

THE PARLOURMAID (*to the MISTRESS, resentfully*). Reahly, madam——!

THE MISTRESS (*to the MASTER, in a tone of warning*). Ernest——!

THE USEFUL MAID (*stuffing her handkerchief into her mouth*). O'ho—o'ho—o'ho——!

THE MASTER. Great Scot——!

THE MISTRESS. Be quiet, Trinder!

THE USEFUL MAID. Oh, what liberality! O'ho—o'ho——!

THE COOK (*in a deep voice*). Apolergizin' for the interruption——

THE MISTRESS (*to the COOK*). What now, Mrs. Hacket?

THE COOK. Apolergizin' for the interruption, if Beechcroft is given permission to bring her friend, I shall expect to 'ave a ticket took for my nephew!

THE MISTRESS. Your—nephew!

(*The MASTER rises, grimly and silently.*)

Your——?

THE COOK. My fav'rite nephew.

THE MISTRESS (*to the MASTER, falteringly*). Ernest——?

THE MASTER (*changing places with the MISTRESS—restraining himself with difficulty*). Forgive me for reminding you, Mrs. Hatchet——

THE MISTRESS. Hacket——

THE MASTER (*with a wave of the hand*). Forgive me for reminding you that your favourite nephew is not *my* favourite nephew, nor Mrs. Dorrington's.

THE COOK. Neither ain't Beechcroft's friend *your* friend, comes to that.

THE MASTER (*his fingers twitching*). True.

THE MISTRESS (*to the COOK*). What is he—this nephew?

THE COOK. 'E's a Dog-exerciser.

THE MISTRESS. Dog-exerciser!

THE MASTER. Dog——!

THE COOK. 'E exercises pet-dogs for ladies stayin' in 'otels—drags their animals round the Park. 'E's got quite a big connection, Albert 'as. I reckon 'e's 'ead of 'is perfesshun.

THE MISTRESS (*to the MASTER, weakly*). Ernie——?

THE COOK. Albert'll end by 'avin' 'is portrait in the *Daily Mirror* it is prophesied.

THE MISTRESS (*to the MASTER*). I—I—I suppose th-there's no objection——?

THE MASTER. Extra ticket?

THE MISTRESS. A-n-n-nother ticket?

THE MASTER (*gutturally*). I suppose not.

THE USEFUL MAID (*unable to repress her tears*). O'ho—o'ho—o'ho——!

THE MISTRESS. Trinder——!

THE USEFUL MAID. Oh, what generosity! Such treatment *I've* never met with, the years *I've* been in service!

THE MISTRESS (*again pacing the room on the left*). This is maddening!

(*The telephone bell is again heard.*)

THE PARLOURMAID (*rising*). Telephone.

THE MASTER (*furiously*). Damn the telephone!

THE HOUSEMAID (*with a sudden jerk and a shiver*). Ho! Ho, my!

(*The PARLOURMAID goes out.*)

THE MISTRESS (*rejoining the MASTER and addressing the HOUSEMAID with asperity*). Oh, I'm forgetting you, Worthingham. We haven't heard from you yet. How many young men do you wish us to take tickets for?

THE HOUSEMAID (*severely*). None, m'm.

THE MISTRESS (*ironically*). None! Astonishing!

THE MASTER (*to the HOUSEMAID*). Oh, come! A favourite cousin——?

THE HOUSEMAID (*shaking her head*). I have been brought

up much more strict than what most girls in my station of life have been brought up, being a Dissenter, and I have no use for men, young or old.

THE MASTER (*with mock concern*). You appal me.

THE HOUSEMAID. Not that men are holy unnecessary, mark you—I don't go so fur as to maintain that.

THE MASTER. What a relief! Even that partial concession——

(*The PARLOURMAID re-enters.*)

Who is it?

THE PARLOURMAID. Wrong numbah.

THE MASTER (*angrily*). Pish!

THE PARLOURMAID (*returning to her chair*). Where-ah are we?

THE MASTER. Where *are* we?

THE PARLOURMAID (*sitting again*). Where-ah have we got to?

THE MASTER. We have got to the desolating disclosure that——er——

THE MISTRESS. Worringham——

THE MASTER. That Worringham has a strong antipathy to the male sex.

THE PARLOURMAID (*disdainfully*). He, he!

THE HOUSEMAID (*to the PARLOURMAID*). Yes, you may laugh, Miss Beechcroft. (*Drawing herself up.*) Neither have I—I must avow it—neither have I the slightest use for theatres, *or* theatre-going.

THE MISTRESS (*gasping*). Oh!

THE HOUSEMAID. A select Cinema now and again, p'r'aps; but theatres, no. (*To the MISTRESS.*) And if I may be pardoned the liberty, m'm, I do think it would ha' been more considerate to have consulted each of us as to our partic'lar tastes and likings before seeking to drive us all to the play-'ouse as though we're a flock o' sheep.

THE MISTRESS (*dropping on to the fauteuil-stool*). Well, I never!

THE MASTER. By Jove, this caps everything!

(*The telephone bell rings again.*)

THE PARLOURMAID (*rising*). Telephone.

THE MISTRESS (*starting up*). Damn the telephone!

THE MASTER (*to the MISTRESS*). Norma!

THE HOUSEMAID (*horrified*). Ho! Ho, dear!

(*The PARLOURMAID goes out.*)

THE MASTER (*to the MISTRESS, in her ear*). Don't lose your dignity.

THE MISTRESS (*wildly*). Bah!

THE MASTER. Keep your dignity; keep your dignity.

THE MISTRESS (*passing him and going to the settee*). Where's Evelyn? Evelyn!

THE MASTER (*pacing the room on the left*). Who's Evelyn?

THE MISTRESS. The kitchenmaid. (*Stamping her foot.*) Evelyn!

THE KITCHENMAID (*struggling to the surface*). Comin', mum.

THE MISTRESS (*shaking her finger at the KITCHENMAID as the girl succeeds in making herself visible*). Now listen to me, Evelyn. I won't stand any nonsense from *you*. Are *you* a playgoer?

THE KITCHENMAID (*a poor little object with a rough head of hair*). I'm willin' to be, mum. I'm gaime for anythink.

THE MASTER (*exultingly*). Ha, ha! Evelyn is game for anything!

THE MISTRESS (*unsteadily*). Ha, ha! That's a comfort. (*To the KITCHENMAID.*) And do *you* demand an extra ticket, child, for a friend or relation?

THE KITCHENMAID. No, mum, thank yer; I got no relations or acquaintances wotsoever.

THE COOK (*to the KITCHENMAID, smothering her again*). 'Ere, don't you be so talkative.

(*The PARLOURMAID returns.*)

THE MISTRESS (*to the PARLOURMAID*). Who is it?

THE PARLOURMAID. Wrong numbah.

THE MISTRESS (*going to the fireplace and clinging to the mantelpiece*). Gur-r-r-rh!

THE MASTER (*coming to the middle of the room*). Curse that Exchange of ours!

THE PARLOURMAID (*coldly*). I have just done so.

THE HOUSEMAID (*shuddering*). Ho!

THE PARLOURMAID (*reseating herself*). Where-ah are we?

THE MASTER (*his hand to his brow*). Where are we?

THE PARLOURMAID. Where-ah have we got to?

THE MASTER (*wearily*). To the discovery of the pleasing circumstance that Evelyn—(*looking at the settee*)—who was here a minute ago—that Evelyn is potentially a patron of the Drama.

(*The door reopens and the ODD MAN appears again. He is carrying a pail of water, some dusters, and his leather. He closes the door softly and goes towards the window. The MASTER reels against the breakfast-table.*)

Norma——!

THE MISTRESS (*turning*). Merciful Powers!

THE MASTER (*intercepting the ODD MAN and bringing him forward*). Blizzard——

THE ODD MAN. Gale, sir. Think of wind.

THE MASTER. I do; but mere wind seems to express the situation inadequately. (*Pointing to the pail.*) What's this?

THE ODD MAN (*depositing the pail upon the floor and producing his paper*). Where's my list o' dooties?

THE MISTRESS (*sitting in the chair on the left of the breakfast-table and clasping her temples*). Oh, Ernest!

THE ODD MAN (*indicating, with a dirty forefinger, an instruction in his paper*). See year.

THE MASTER (*blinking at the paper*). The words swim before me.

THE ODD MAN (*reading*). "Thursday." What's to-day?

THE MASTER. Thursday.

THE ODD MAN. "Thursday." (*Pointing to instructions on paper.*) "Clean mornin'-room winders." (*He replaces the paper in his pocket and is about to pick up the pail.*)

THE MASTER (*touching the ODD MAN's arm, with terrible calmness*). No. You have conquered by the aid of fate and

a superior intelligence. Sit down. You are a regular servant.

(*Displaying great alacrity, the ODD MAN takes the chair before the writing-table and seats himself by the PARLOURMAID. The MASTER sits in the chair at the farther side of the breakfast-table and rests his head upon his hands.*)

THE USEFUL MAID (*her bosom heaving*). O'ho—o'ho—o'ho——!

THE MISTRESS (*stopping her ears*). Ah, don't!

THE USEFUL MAID. Oh, what soft-heartedness! O'ho

THE MISTRESS (*frantically*). Trinder——!

THE USEFUL MAID (*her sobs subsiding*). O'ho—o'ho—o'ho——!

THE MISTRESS (*sinking back in her chair, exhausted*). Oh!

THE ODD MAN (*after a look round, coughing to attract the MASTER's attention*). Ahem! Ahem! May I ventcher for to arsk——?

THE MASTER (*raising his head*). What is all this year about?

THE ODD MAN. Egzactly, sir.

THE MASTER (*to the ODD MAN*). I will answer your question with another. Are you a playgoer?

THE ODD MAN (*appealing to the air*). Am I a playgoer! (*To the MASTER, volubly.*) Don't my mother keep a small shop in Crawford Street, Mary'bone, an' ain't she continu'ly receivin' orders for exhibitin' the theayter bills?

THE MASTER. Indeed?

THE ODD MAN. Yus, indeed. An' the wus the failyers at the theayters, the quicker the orders flows in.

THE MASTER. Doubtless.

THE ODD MAN. Why, lor' bless yer, sir, we liter'y pray for fiarscos, mother an' me!

THE MASTER. Enough. I am satisfied that you are, in the fullest sense, a patron of the Drama. (*To the MISTRESS, whose eyes are closed.*) My darling, all that is left to do, it seems to me, is to complete the arrangements for the—er—approaching festivity.

THE ODD MAN (*joyously*). What! (*Slapping his thigh.*) Do I guess right! Is there a beano on?

THE MASTER (*to the ODD MAN*). You are correct in your surmise. There is a beano on. (*To the MISTRESS.*) Norma—?

THE COOK (*as the MISTRESS opens her eyes*). Apolergizin' for the interruption—

THE MISTRESS (*shutting her eyes again, feebly*). Oh!

THE COOK. Apolergizin' for the interruption, as Worringham ain't to be one o' the party, she will be able to mind the 'ouse durin' our absences an' warm our suppers.

THE ODD MAN (*following the proceedings with the keenest interest*). 'Ear, 'ear!

THE HOUSEMAID (*to the COOK, bridling*). Ho, no, she won't; cert'nly not!

THE MISTRESS (*again opening her eyes*). That is for me to decide.

THE HOUSEMAID (*to the MISTRESS*). Begging your pardon, m'm, but I never said I wasn't ready to sacrifice my priv't feelings and beliefs, and to go to the theatre, to oblige.

THE MISTRESS (*rallying*). To oblige!

THE MASTER. Oblige!

THE HOUSEMAID (*to the MASTER*). Yes, sir, for the sake o' my feller-servants as well as for yours and Mrs. Dorrington's.

THE MASTER. For the sake of your—?

THE HOUSEMAID. To give the party an air of respectability, as it wear.

THE COOK. Respectability!

THE PARLOURMAID. Respectability!

THE COOK (*to the HOUSEMAID*). I'd 'ave you know, Miss Grace Worringham—

THE PARLOURMAID. Insulting cat!

THE ODD MAN (*softly*). Order, order!

THE USEFUL MAID (*weeping*). O'ho, what dissensions! O'ho—!

THE KITCHENMAID (*endeavouring to bring herself into view*). 'Ere lem'me say somethink!

THE COOK (*to the KITCHENMAID*). You shut up, Evelyn Platch.

THE PARLOURMAID (*derisively*). He, he, he, he!

THE MISTRESS (*struggling to her feet*). Stop! Stop——!

(*The telephone bell rings again.*)

Telephone!

THE PARLOURMAID (*rising*). Damn the telephone!

THE MISTRESS. Beechcroft!

THE HOUSEMAID (*clapping her hand to her heart*). Ho! Ho, my goodness!

(*The PARLOURMAID stalks out.*)

THE MISTRESS (*leaning upon the breakfast-table, panting*). You—you'll drive me into a lunatic asylum, amongst you!

THE MASTER (*rising and approaching the MISTRESS*). My darling, you must *not* agitate yourself—— (*Barking his shin against the pail.*) Oh——!

THE MISTRESS (*sympathetically*). Oh, Ernie!

THE MASTER (*in great pain*). Ah! (*Picking up the pail.*) TSSS——!

THE ODD MAN (*to the MASTER, not stirring*). Now you see, sir, 'ow easily accidents 'appen to us dermestics. On'y yusterday——

THE MASTER (*to the MISTRESS*). You must *not* agitate yourself in this way, Pussy. (*Wincing.*) Your original plan——tell them——

THE MISTRESS (*advancing to the SERVANTS*). My plan is, not to send you all to the theatre on the same night, but in botches——

THE MASTER (*close behind her*). Batches.

THE MISTRESS (*to the MASTER, on the verge of tears*). Oh, don't catch me up so! (*To the SERVANTS.*) Mrs. Hacket and her nephew, and Evelyn and Trinder are to go first; Worringham, Beechcroft and her friend, and——and——and——(*to the MASTER*)——what's his name? . . .

THE MASTER (*savagely*). Typhoon——

THE MISTRESS (*to the SERVANTS*). Typhoon——(*darting a*

glance of reproach at the MASTER)—no, it isn't!—(*pointing to the ODD MAN*)—and *him* the second night.

THE MASTER (*to the MISTRESS*). He the second night.

THE MISTRESS (*to the MASTER*). Don't!

THE ODD MAN (*to the MISTRESS*). I'll go *both* nights, m'm, if it'll promote 'armony.

THE MISTRESS (*to the ODD MAN*). You shall do nothing of the sort!

THE USEFUL MAID (*weeping copiously*). I'd stay at home and hot up the suppers with glee.

THE MISTRESS (*frenzied*). Oh——!

THE COOK. Apologizin' for the interruption——

THE MISTRESS (*to the COOK*). Now what——?

THE COOK. Apologizin' for the interruption, in all good 'ouses, whenever there's a speshul out, the cook goes with the butler.

THE MISTRESS. We don't keep a butler.

THE MASTER. We don't keep a butler.

THE COOK (*emphatically*). An' where no butler is kep', she goes with the parlourmaid.

THE MASTER (*to the MISTRESS, in a whisper*). Rearrange it! Rearrange it!

THE MISTRESS (*to the MASTER*). I won't. (*To the COOK, fiercely.*) Mrs. Hacket——!

THE COOK. Oh, I mealy stated wot is custom'ry in good 'ouses——

THE ODD MAN (*to the MISTRESS*). Count *me* as the butler, m'm, if it'll 'elp yer out of yer mess.

THE MISTRESS. I won't. (*To the PARLOURMAID, who reappears at this juncture and returns to her chair.*) Who was it?

THE PARLOURMAID (*distantly*). My friend.

THE MISTRESS (*to the MASTER*). Our telephone!

THE MASTER (*changing places with the MISTRESS—to the PARLOURMAID*). Impudence!

THE PARLOURMAID (*to the MASTER*). Reahly——!

THE MISTRESS (*discovering that the MASTER is unthinkingly carrying the pail about with him—under her breath*). Oh! Ernest——!

THE PARLOURMAID (*reseating herself*). Where-ah are we?

THE MASTER (*to the PARLOURMAID*). Oh, we can't keep on going back for *you*, you know.

THE MISTRESS. Ernie——!

THE MASTER (*to the MISTRESS, over his shoulder*). Hay.

THE PARLOURMAID (*deeply injured*). Oh, very well, then I shall lose the thread of it.

THE MASTER (*to the PARLOURMAID*). All right, then, you've *got* to lose the thread of it.

THE MISTRESS. Ernest——!

THE MASTER (*turning to the MISTRESS*). What is it?

THE MISTRESS (*looking at him significantly*). Pail!

THE MASTER (*self-pityingly*). Pale, am I? (*Passing his hand across his face.*) I don't wonder.

THE MISTRESS. No, no. (*Taking the pail from him.*) Give it to me.

THE MASTER. Oh——!

THE MISTRESS (*in his ear*). You are losing your dignity. (*She moves away with the pail and stands it upon the floor between the fireplace and the breakfast-table.*)

THE ODD MAN (*to the MASTER, highly tickled by his strange behaviour*). Ho, ho! Fancy you, sir, walkin' about with a pail for choice! Ho, ho, ho! That beats me!

THE MASTER (*light-headedly*). Ha, ha, ha, ha!

THE COOK. Apologizin' for the interruption——

THE MASTER (*to the COOK*). Don't mention it.

THE COOK. Apologizin' for the interruption, 'pears to me there is on'y one more little matter to be disposed of.

THE MASTER. One—more——?

THE COOK. *Wot* theatre, an' *wot* play, are we all to be packed off to?

THE MASTER. Quite so; quite so. (*Eyeing the MISTRESS, who, with a look of leaden apathy, has sunk down upon the fauteuil-stool.*) Dearest——?

THE USEFUL MAID (*with a wail*). O'hoo! I'm for a hearty laugh, I am.

THE ODD MAN (*slapping his leg again*). So'm I! So'm I!

THE USEFUL MAID (*blubbing*). I was always celebrated for my gaiety till my teeth failed me.

THE HOUSEMAID. As for laughter, nobody can laugh louder than what I can, when provoked. (*Straightening her back.*) The play I will *not* consent to witness is the play containin' love an' passion.

THE KITCHENMAID (*coming to the surface again*). 'Ere, I've no sech objection!

THE COOK (*to the KITCHENMAID*). You 'old your tongue, Evelyn.

THE ODD MAN (*to the HOUSEMAID*). G'arn! Don't be so simple. They on'y pretend.

THE HOUSEMAID. Pretend. (*Quiveringly.*) *I've* heard. Lips glued to lips!

THE PARLOURMAID (*icily*). If I may pass a remark——

THE MASTER (*to the PARLOURMAID*). You may.

THE PARLOURMAID. The propah thing to do is to wait and consult my friend.

THE HOUSEMAID (*witheringly*). Your friend! (*Sniffing.*) Why not Mrs. Hacket's nephew while you're about it!

THE COOK (*to the HOUSEMAID*). Yus, an' w'y not!

THE HOUSEMAID. Ho!

THE PARLOURMAID (*curling her lip at the HOUSEMAID*). Cheek!

THE COOK (*to the HOUSEMAID*). Utter a syllerble against my nephew——!

THE ODD MAN (*pacifically*). Cookie, cookie, cookie——!

THE USEFUL MAID (*weeping*). O'ho! Dissension *on* dissension!

THE KITCHENMAID. 'Ere——!

THE MISTRESS (*rousing herself*). Silence! Silence!

THE MASTER (*to the MISTRESS, helplessly*). Norma——?

THE MISTRESS (*starting up and advancing to the SERVANTS*). Now understand me clearly, once and for all. You servants will go exactly where Mr. Dorrington and I choose to send you.

THE ODD MAN (*to the MISTRESS*). I 'aven't been to one o' the 'alls lately, m'm——

THE MISTRESS (*to the ODD MAN*). Silence! (*To the female servants.*) And that will be to no entertainment of a trivial and frivolous character.

THE ODD MAN (*urgently*). Mother don't git no paper for the 'alls.

THE MISTRESS (*to the ODD MAN*). Be quiet! (*To the female servants.*) What you will see is a play of ideas, something to stimulate your imaginations and make you think.

THE COOK. Ideers!

THE PARLOURMAID (*with a sickly expression*). Make us think!

THE ODD MAN (*gloomily*). Crikey!

THE MISTRESS. A slice cut clean out of life, in fact. (*Desperately.*) You follow me?

THE HOUSEMAID. Souns 'orribly crool.

THE KITCHENMAID (*awestruck*). Does that mean that knives is freely used, mum?

THE MISTRESS. Not necessarily—except by the Censor.

THE COOK (*after a pause, during which the servants look at each other inquiringly*). Well, any'ow, gals, it strikes me we're in for a preshus dull evenin'.

THE MISTRESS (*throwing up her arms*). Oh——!

THE MASTER (*who has been fuming at the back of the room*). Oh——! (*Coming to grief over the pail again as he hurries to the MISTRESS.*) Dash and blow!

THE MISTRESS (*turning to him*). Ernest!

THE MASTER (*limping towards her*). Ah! Tsss! (*Shaking his fist at the COOK.*) You—you—you ill-conditioned, odious old woman!

THE COOK. Odious!

THE MISTRESS (*to the COOK*). Odious!

THE COOK. Old!

THE MISTRESS (*to the COOK*). You told me you were forty. Forty!

THE MASTER (*rubbing his leg*). Fifty, if she's a day!

THE COOK (*to the MISTRESS*). I *was* forty a week ago, before I entered your service. This is the lars' stor. I leave at the end o' my month.

THE MISTRESS. Do!

THE MASTER. Do!

THE COOK. An' wot's more, I take my kitchenmaid with me.

THE MISTRESS. Certainly.

THE MASTER. Certainly.

THE PARLOURMAID. *I leave also.*

THE HOUSEMAID. *An' me.*

THE USEFUL MAID. *An' me.*

THE PARLOURMAID. I reahly couldn't remain in a place where-ah changes are so frequently made. Most disadvantageous.

THE HOUSEMAID. Nor I where such langwidge is spoke as 'as been spoke this morning in my hearing.

THE USEFUL MAID (*weeping*). To be thrown with a strange set o' girls after being p-p-perfectly happy with this set 'ud be more than I could bear. O'ho—o'ho——!

THE MISTRESS (*hysterically*). Ha, ha, ha, ha! (*To the MASTER.*) And this—ha, ha!—and this is the result of my new system! Ha, ha, ha, ha!

(*Led by the COOK, all the female servants rise, the COOK clutching the KITCHENMAID.*)

THE COOK (*to the MISTRESS*). Noo systum, yer call it! A nice noo systum! I 'ope it'll be a less'n to you both, not to treat fus'-clars servants patronizin'ly an' condescendin'ly.

THE MASTER (*advancing*). Oh, go to the devil!

THE COOK (*to the MASTER*). At any rate, with 'im I shouldn't 'ave the constant complaints I've 'ad in this 'ouse about there bein' no 'ot water for the baths.

THE MISTRESS (*to the MASTER*). Yah-h-h-h! Now we've laid ourselves open to repartee!

THE COOK (*to the servants*). Come 'long, an' let's resoom our lunches.

(*The female servants make for the door, murmuring as they go.*)

THE KITCHENMAID (*still in the grip of the COOK, sullenly*). 'Ere, I dun'no where I am!

THE HOUSEMAID. I had a foreboding I'd got with desolate people, from the first.

THE USEFUL MAID. O'ho—o'ho——!

THE PARLOURMAID. Shouldn't be surprised if this exhilarates my marriage.

THE COOK. Odious! An' old! Ho, ho, ho!

(They take their departure and the door is closed with a slam.)

THE MISTRESS *(clinging to the MASTER and breaking down)*. Oh-h-h-h—!

THE MASTER. Never mind, Pussy; never mind. Pluck up.

THE MISTRESS *(crying upon his shoulder)*. Oh! Oh! Oh! All the ground to go over again! All over again!

(They become conscious that they are not alone, and that the ODD MAN is standing by the settee and regarding them benevolently.)

THE MASTER *(to the MISTRESS, hoarsely)*. No; not all!

THE MISTRESS *(in a whisper)*. The Odd Man!

(Very quietly she fetches the pail and hands it to the MASTER.)

THE MASTER *(presenting it to the ODD MAN, with an ingratiating smile)*. Allow me—

CURTAIN

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